

FOR THE MEN AND WOMEN WHO SERVE AT THE TOP OF THE WORLD

# THULE TIMES

821st Air Base Group Thule AB, Greenland

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Volume 4

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## Thule Times Editorial Staff

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# Thule Air Base—Don't Stop Now

By Col Edward Fienga  
821st Air Base Group commander

It is often customary in some organizations to take time out at the end of a year and revel in the year's accomplishments. I'll be the first to tell you, we had a year worthy of "revelation," but our relentless 24/7 missions don't afford us such luxury. Nonetheless, in looking back on the year, your year, even temporarily, you can be justifiably proud of a year well done.

The combination of performance while under higher headquarters inspections—the Headquarters Air Force Space Command Inspector General Operations Readiness Inspection, Unit Compliance Inspection, the HQ AFSPC External Environment, Safety, Occupational Health Compliance and Management Program Inspection, and the ATSEP Inspection of the airfield—and operations—BOXTOP I and II, BRILLIANT ICE, during which we generated an additional 204 sorties above the 3,100 plus "routine" sorties, moved an additional 347 passengers, 480,000 pounds of cargo and 1.6 million gallons of fuel to our international partners while maintaining an exceptional 99.25 percent uptime rate for air traffic control and landing systems, exceeding the command standard of 98 percent. Your stunning performances



Photo by Tech Sgt. Robert Bondurant

**821st Security Forces Squadron members "rescue" a car accident victim during the Air Force Space Command Inspector General Operations Readiness Inspection, Unit Compliance Inspection in September.**

throughout it all while sustaining steady state activities to provide base support and protection for our space superiority missions has been no less than inspirational.

Your mission-focused performance led to a greater than 99.9 percent mission success rates for both BMEWS and Det 3. By any measure, it was an incredible year.

The powerful contribution we made to the wing's inspection results was no less impressive. With eight Professional Teams, nine Professional Performers and seven others "coined" by IG inspectors, you made an impression and you made a difference.

A difference was also made down at the port, where we handled 6,700 short tons of cargo, off-loaded 8.9 million gallons of fuel from a tanker ship during our highest winds of the summer season without spilling a single drop, a crucial lifeline for space superiority missions and our own quality of life—all while conducting around the clock pier construction to preserve Thule's, and the Air Force's only, deep water port.

Not only did we secure a future for our port, we also fielded the \$750,000 Advantur Intrusion Detection Alarm System, Thule's first ever



Photo courtesy of Greenland Contractor

**Heavy machinery is offloaded at the pier. Over 6,700 short tons of cargo and 8.9 million gallons of fuel were off-loaded from ships during the summer season at the Air Force's only deep water port.**

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# CHRISTMAS COMES EARLY



**Traditionally members of Team Thule fly to Qaanaaq, to play Santa and help hand out the gifts. However, this year due to inclement weather the trip was canceled but that did not stop the children from receiving their gifts. (Photos taken by Ferdinand Mage, Qaanaaq)**

By Capt Elizabeth Paul, 821st Air Base Group public affairs

**C**hristmas came early this year for the 178 children in Qaanaaq, a village roughly 75 miles from here, to be precise it came on Dec. 19.

The Thule community was able to play Santa's elves and make the children's Christmas a little better by purchasing toys and clothes and individually wrapping each one for the children, and it was all made possible through OPERATION Julemand, an annual fund-raiser coined after the Danish word for *Santa Claus*.

"Throughout the year, Thule residents

raised over \$15,000 for OPERATION Julemand," said Chaplain (Capt.) David Zavala, OPERATION Julemand committee chair. "The money is then used to buy presents for over 245 children in Qaanaaq and the surrounding villages."

Each year the Julemand Executive Committee Treasurer, the Danish Liaison Office, coordinate with the Qaanaaq social committee to obtain a list of the names of every child under the age of 15. Gifts are then ordered and shipped to Thule for wrapping and distribution.

Air Greenland donates cargo space on its' flights to Qaanaaq to deliver the presents to Qaanaaq in time for the Christmas party. Air Greenland also



time fundraising, buying the presents and wrapping them but Christmas waited for no one, not even Santa Claus."

OPERATION Julemand was first started in 1959 when base service officer, Capt John McTamney, and Airman First Class Delbert Cox, CBF clerk decided that as long as they could not be at home with their own children, they would bring a little happiness to the children in the local area.

"OPERATION Julemand has been a year-long fundraiser since 1959," said Chaplain Zavala. "Money is raised from June to June and goes to pay for the presents and monetary donation and all the extras that go with the operation."

This year money was raised through several efforts, beginning with a 'Run for Julemand' marathon that Airman First Class Dashun Carter initiated during the annual Thule Marathon in August, raising \$1,500 through sponsorship (See page

4 for full story).

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delivers gifts to the children in the outlying villages of Siorapaluk, Savig-sivik, Qeqertat and Moriussaq.

Traditionally, members of Team Thule fly to Qaanaaq, courtesy of Air Greenland, to play Santa and help hand out the gifts. However, this year due to inclement weather the trip was canceled but that did not stop the children from receiving their gifts.

"It was a little anticlimactic that we couldn't help hand out the presents at the annual Christmas party in Qaanaaq this year," said Col. Edward Fienga, 821st Air Base Group commander. "Seeing the kids tear into their presents is the highlight of OPERATION Julemand for us. Our folks spend a lot of



# Are You Physically Fit??

By Airman Rose Birchard, 821st Support Squadron

Are you one of the ones who when your yearly PT test comes around you get really nervous because you don't think you can pass? So you start going to the gym a couple of weeks beforehand *just* to pass with the bare minimum? Are you noticing that you're not as energetic during the day or just plain tired but still have a hard time sleeping at night?

If this describes you, I've got some great news. Did you know that just a 30 to 45 minute work out three to five times a week can solve your problems? Just think about it, that's less than an hour out of your 24 hour day at the most!

What better place is there than Thule to get into a good habit of going to the gym and actually enjoying your time there? Come on, lets face it, now that the dark season has hit there isn't a whole lot to do on the weekends and after work hours.

Think about our advantages, what civilian job do you know that will actually let you get off an hour early from work three times a week to go and work out! If you ask me, there is absolutely no reason why you shouldn't be in the best shape of your life!

When you first start your workout, there's a big chance that you're going to be counting down the seconds until you leave the gym and that's totally normal. I am pretty sure you didn't like that first time you tried to ride a bike either. Remember the pain of that first fall? So why did you get back up on that bike? It's because biking was fun and something you could do with friend. The same goes with working out, when you first start working out you're most likely going to be out of shape so of course you're not going to enjoy it. Just like that first bike ride, enjoying it comes with time.

Working out has an acquired taste like a lot of things, there's probably a big chance that you're not going to like it at first, but then you will start to realize how much better you are sleeping at night and how good you are feeling during the day.

I do understand that working out can be just plain boring at the gym, but it's not like we can just go outside to enjoy the fresh air and scenery here unless you just really love the cold and losing feeling in your limbs.

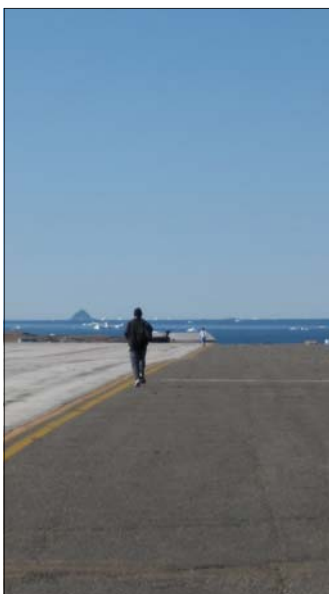
There are ways to make working out in the gym more fun. For instance, listening to your favorite songs can help

keep your mind occupied and take your focus off of the pain at the same time.

Another way of making your time at the gym more fun is trying to find someone with similar goals or someone that's maybe a little more advanced than you to help push you along. Everyone needs an extra push every once in a while, not to mention it's also nice to have someone to talk to and make the time go by faster.

There're also plenty of classes offered by the gym that can be really motivating like spinning, body pump, back strengthening, fitball and step aerobics. The gym also offers different activities like archery, badminton, basketball, soccer, floor hockey and volleyball (see the sign-up board at the fitness center for classes and activities). Also, many people don't know this but the gym does give out t-shirts for miles ran at the 100, 200, and 500 mile mark, and at the 1000 mile mark you receive a plaque. Did you know if you run an average of a mile and a half a day you could reach the 500 mile mark?

When you leave Thule, why not leave with something to stand for, so when people ask you what you did up here you can say "I ran 500 miles". Think of how great that would sound!



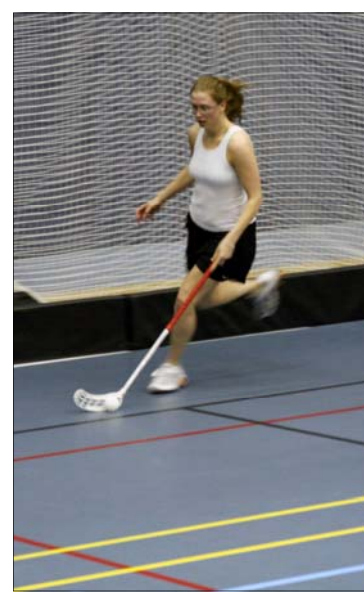
During the Summer months running on the SAC ramp is a great way to stay in shape.



Playing a team sport is a great idea for those who need a little motivation when it comes to fitness.



Tech Sergeant James McManus, 12th Space Warning Squadron, uses spin to stay fit.



Airman Nichole Hersh, 821st Security Forces Squadron, slaps around the 'puck'. Indoor hockey gets the heart pumping.



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certified security system, ensuring long-term security of our Protection Level resources and mission success.

Of course, the list continues well beyond the space limits of this article and includes significant milestones like the \$900,000 technical refreshing of our base LAN, and \$140,000 in replacement of computers--our first in three years. Fighting the server seems like a distant memory now.

Although not as significant in dollar value, but perhaps even more so in terms of Quality of Life, the new Airmen's Center is truly a center of Team Thule excellence. It began as a vision and materialized through a grant from the Air Force Chaplain and was fueled by the energy of our very own team members who wanted to make Thule a better place, for us, and for those after us.

And did you give! Your incredible selfless service to the missions was only exceeded by your selfless giving to our two big charities of the year, OPERATION Julemand and the Combined Federal Campaign, while also creating a third, Relay for Life.

At over \$15,000, OPERATION Julemand was an overwhelming outpouring of generosity from the base for our Greenlandic neighbors in the village of Qaanaaq.

During CFC you generated an equally impressive \$12,300. This amount equates to approximately \$1,300 more than last year's total, or on average \$10 more per military person than last year's total.

That's the power of Team Thule: sure, some folks are "super givers," however; we are not reliant on one person to do everything. With our unique combination of security operations, port ops, airfield ops, base ops, space ops, we collectively and synergistically produced "an incredible year."

Similarly, and speaking more in terms of your performance on the job than your generosity away from it, if it weren't presumptuous to challenge you to do better next year, I would defy each of you to give "\$10" more during this coming year. So, if you can find it in yourself, how about another \$10 dollars of professionalism, dedication to doing your very best, or in other terms, \$10 more worth of Integrity, Service before Self and Excellence in all you do?

This sort of charity, as the men and women of Team Thule so skillfully demonstrated during 2006, truly continues to provide and sustain throughout the year. Congratulations on a great year, very well done. Now, let's lock and load for an even better, more bountiful, 2007.

## Airman Takes On Fitness for Charity

Shortly after arriving at his first duty assignment here, Airman First Class Dashun Carter became fascinated with the idea of running a full marathon 750 miles north of the Arctic Circle.

As luck would have it, the Thule Fitness and Sports Center holds an annual full/half marathon, and Airman Carter saw it as an ideal opportunity to take on a new challenge.

Realizing the demands this run would require, he sought help from a couple of people he knew could provide him with the direction he needed to get started.

Airman Carter began a training regime including a variation between speed intervals and uphill running. This demanding 32 week training program sometimes require over 35 miles of running per week.

"All my life I've sought physical challenges," explained Airman Carter. "And I've found that they've made me stronger mentally once accomplished. Initially, I wanted to run just to have a full marathon under my belt of life's accomplishments, but found the idea not rewarding enough. I was beginning to lack motivation and needed to find a reason to complete the race that went beyond me so I'm not the only one benefiting from it."

So, Airman Carter devised a plan and initiated a sponsored run for the local Julemand fundraiser. Airman Carter asked residents of Thule to pledge money towards his run in support of OPERATION Julemand, a local charitable organization that provides toys for local children during the Christmas season and on-going support to the Qaanaaq youth center and elderly home.

With this new found sense of motivation, Airman Carter was ready to run!

The day before the marathon, Airman Carter traveled with Col. Edward Fienga, 821<sup>st</sup> Air Base Group commander, via helicopter to the community of Qaanaaq, to see first hand what his efforts would support. Airman Carter received a tour of the village, met locals, and viewed buildings in construction awaiting more funds to be completed. This eye-opening experience further propelled his motivation and gave him the drive to complete the marathon the next day.

The day of the marathon Airman Carter found himself at the marathon starting point in close to freezing temperatures equipped with only a 30 gigabyte IPOD and power gel to feed his body energy throughout the run.

Towards the end of the run, Airman Carter was joined by Capt. Frank Reyes, 821<sup>st</sup> Security Forces Squadron commander, and Chief Master Sgt. Bruce Heinzen, 821<sup>st</sup> Air Base Group superintendent, providing motivation for the weary Airman. Four hours and 40 minutes later, Airman Carter reached the finish line greeted by a host of 821st Security Forces co-workers and other Team Thule members.

Thanks to the generous pledges from those who donated, Airman Carter raised \$1,500 for OPERATION Julemand, the largest single donation for the fundraiser.

The self-proclaimed avid runner explained the overall experience as "enlightening and a blessing".

"It was enlightening in the sense of how much you learn about your body and yourself," said Airman Carter. "You question yourself why you commit to certain things and at what cost. I thank God for the strength throughout the run and the support of the people of Thule."

Asked if he would ever commit to another marathon he said "only if I found a cause as equally or more rewarding."

(Courtesy of 821<sup>st</sup> Security Forces Squadron)



Photo by Airman First Class Artem Kamalov

**Airman First Class Dashun Carter, 821<sup>st</sup> Security Forces Squadron runs his first marathon here. Airman Carter raised \$1,500 for OPERATION Julemand through sponsorship for his run.**



Traditionally members of Team Thule fly to Qaanaaq, courtesy of Air Greenland, to play Santa and help hand out the gifts. However, this year due to inclement weather the trip was canceled but that did not stop the children from receiving their gifts. (Photos taken by Ferdinand Maqe, Qaanaaq)

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Other fund-raisers included coin drop boxes at retail outlets on base, manning a coat check-booth at the First Night Festival, a head-shaving extravaganza, individual cash donation, and the Jule-

mand Festival.

"The Julemand Festival is the biggest single money maker for OPERATION Julemand," said Chaplain Zavala. "The all day event, raised over \$5,500, with the volunteers being the key component for the success."

The festival included sporting events at the Fitness Center, such as a rowing competition, a six-hour spinning marathon, basketball free-throws, football throw, and radar fast-pitch, while also offering an opportunity to pay for a 30-minute mas-

sage. Besides plenty of food, the Community Center featured such events as The Longest Drive golf game, a Texas Hold-Em' tournament, Danish Pool, an auction, Pie-in-the-Face, and the popular Jail and Bail, where donators could have their friends "arrested" and locked-up in

"jail". The Thule Heritage Hall offered a Movie & A Tour, featuring *The Thule Accident*, a film recounting the B-52 crash near Thule on Jan. 21, 1968. The day concluded with a new event, Thule Idol. Nine contestants tried their luck and vocal cords singing Karaoke for the coveted title of best singer on Thule. The TOW Club patrons voted with dollars to select the winner.

"Bringing Christmas to the children of Greenland brought the gift of holiday cheer and the internal rewards of generosity to people here," said Colonel Fienga.

"Team Thule members, whether American, Danish, Greenlandic or Canadian, really showed me the spirit of Christmas this year with their dedication and generosity to bringing joy to children they don't even know," he said. "We're proud to be partners with the Qaanaaq community and are honored to be a part of this special holiday tradition."

A trip to Qaanaaq is planned for the first part of 2007 to present the village with two checks for their Kindergarten and elderly home.

## OPERATION Julemand Christmas Raffle



Photo by Capt. Elizabeth Paul

The Danish Liaison Office held its annual Christmas OPERATION Julemand raffle drawing Dec 21. The lucky winning tickets were selected by Commander Tommy Toft, Danish Liaison Officer (center) (from left to right) Chaplain (Capt.) David Zavala, 821<sup>st</sup> Air Base Group chaplain, Col Edward Fienga, 821<sup>st</sup> Air Base Group commander, Chaplain (Lt Col.) Michael Padazinski, visiting Priest, and Chief Petty Officer Soren Pedersen, Danish Liaison Office also selected winning numbers.

To raise money for OPERATION Julemand, the base's annual fundraiser, the Danish Liaison Office organized and executed it's annual Christmas raffle drawing this month.

This year the DLO put together a long list of prizes including two round-trip tickets to Denmark, a visit to Qaanaaq for a dogsled and fishing adventure, cash prizes and gift certificates, a photo safari and native crafts.

Over 3,000 raffle tickets were sold raising over \$3,000 for OPERATION Julemand, bringing the total fundraising for the year to just over \$15,000.

The winning tickets were selected Dec 21 by Col Edward Fienga, 821<sup>st</sup> Air Base Group commander, Chaplain (Capt.) David Zavala, 821<sup>st</sup> Air Base Group chaplain, Chaplain (Lt Col.) Michael Padazinski, visiting Priest, Commander Tommy Toft, Danish Liaison Officer and Chief Petty Officer Soren Pedersen, Danish Liaison Office.

Benny Pedersen, Greenland Contractor, won first prize which were two round-trip tickets to Denmark. Jens Mathiesen, Greenland Contractor, won second prize, a visit to Qaanaaq for a dogsled and fishing adventure and Marie Michaelsen, Greenland Contractor, won the third prize, a \$250 cash prize.

Prizes were donated by Air Greenland, Greenland Contractor, Tele-Post, Thule City Council, AAFES, and the Top of the World Club.



## Schedule announced for release of tax statements

**WASHINGTON (AFPN)** -- Service-members, military retirees and annuitants, and federal civilian employees paid by the Defense Finance and Accounting Service can expect to receive their 2006 tax statements beginning this month, DFAS officials announced today.

DFAS customers with access to the secure, Web-based "myPay" system will be able to retrieve their tax statements electronically up to two weeks sooner than those relying on regular mail delivery, officials said.

The myPay system includes layers of defense against identity theft, officials noted, adding that its technology meets or exceeds security requirements in private industry worldwide.

"Tax statements are available online, allowing customers to view and print W2s and 1099Rs," said Patrick Shine, DFAS operations director. "Whether anyone needs the statements to complete taxes or just wants an extra copy for their records, the tax statements can

be accessed and printed at any time. The printable statements are approved by the Internal Revenue Service."

Here are projected distribution dates for DFAS customers' tax statements:

- Retiree Annual Statement: Available on myPay Dec. 9, mailed via U.S. Postal Service Dec. 16-31;
- Retiree 1099R: Available on myPay Dec. 15, mailed Dec. 16-31;
- Annuitant Account Statement: Available on myPay Dec. 18, mailed Dec. 19-31;
- Annuitant 1099R: Available on myPay Dec. 18, mailed Dec. 19-31;
- VSI/SSB W-2: Not available on myPay, mailed Jan. 4-5;
- Active Duty Air Force, Army, Navy W-2: Available on myPay Jan. 22, mailed Jan. 23-29;
- Reserve Air Force, Army, Navy W-2: Available on myPay Jan. 2, mailed Jan. 5-8;
- Marine Corps active and reserve W-2: Available on myPay Jan. 5, mailed Jan. 9-10;

-- Civilian employee W-2: Available on myPay Jan. 9, mailed Jan. 11-18;

-- Savings Deposit Program 1099INT: Available on myPay Jan. 19, mailed Jan. 19-20; and

-- Vendor Pay 1099: Not available on myPay, mailed Jan. 27-31.

Mr. Shine added that current myPay account holders can eliminate the costs associated with generating and distributing the tax statements immediately by signing up and using myPay. A personal identification number, or PIN, is required to use the system, and eligible users can apply for one at the myPay Web site, [www.mypay.dfas.mil](http://www.mypay.dfas.mil).

Users with military e-mail addresses --addresses in the .mil domain -- or a pre-registered personal e-mail address can receive their new PIN via e-mail. All others will receive their new PIN via mail in about 10 working days from the date of request, officials said.

Customers who already had obtained a PIN but have forgotten it can apply for a new one at the myPay site.



**BX NEWS**

**NEW HOURS  
OF OPERATION**

**BEGINNING 6 JANUARY, 2007  
YOUR THULE BX WILL BE OPEN  
THE FOLLOWING HOURS:**

**SAT: 1000-1800  
SUN: CLOSED  
MON-FRI: 1030-1330  
AND 1600-2000**

**WAREHOUSE  
SALE**

**JANUARY 6, 2007  
THE BX WILL HOLD ITS  
ANNUAL WAREHOUSE SALE  
AT BUILDING 1409  
0900-1500**

VOLUNTEERS ARE NEEDED.

For questions, comments or more information contact Ms. Cheeseboro, BX  
Manager at [cheeseborog@aafes.com](mailto:cheeseborog@aafes.com) x-3200 or 3503

# 2006 suicide numbers not start of trend

The number of suicides among Airmen in fiscal 2006 rose about 14 percent above a ten year average for the service, but the increase is not likely the start of a trend, an Air Force official said.

"The suicide rate for 2006 is most indicative of the random variations year-to-year of suicides," said Lt. Col. Steven Pflanz of the Air Force Medical Operations Agency suicide prevention office.

The Air Force measures suicides in terms of deaths per 100,000 Airmen. The suicide rate for 2004 was 15.2. In 2005, the rate dropped to 7.8. And in 2006, it rose again to 11.4. But the service's average for the 10-year period beginning in FY 1997 is just 10, a 28 percent decrease in suicides from the previous decade.

The Air Force has had more success in reducing suicides than any other organization in the world. That decrease is due largely to implementation of the Air Force's suicide prevention program in 1996, said Colonel Pflanz.

"The Air Force has had a lot of success in reducing suicides over the last decade with our suicide prevention program," he said. "Much of the rest of the world and the country look to the Air Force suicide prevention program as a model for preventing

suicide at the community level."

The colonel said that in the Air Force, the suicide prevention program is successful because it is community driven.

"Suicide prevention is a community responsibility," he said. "The wing commander and wing psychiatrist don't know everyone who is in distress, so if we wait until people get to their offices, we are going to miss the boat. Our program asks that Airmen of all ranks be looking for folks who are having trouble every day, so we can bring in assistance as early as possible."

The result of the Air Force suicide prevention program was a 28 percent decrease in suicide rates in the decade following its implementation.

"If we had a drug that reduced death due to illness by 28 percent, it would be flying off the shelves," Colonel Pflanz said. "Yet, that is what our suicide prevention program is doing."

At Thule, the Suicide Prevention Program is in full swing. This program is a fixed component at every Arctic Start. Since its inception in 1996, the Air Force Suicide Prevention Program has evolved to become a training program conducted in smaller settings, creating a more attentive

and interactive environment.

The goal at Thule is to ensure that all personnel get through this unique remote assignment alive and healthy. This goal is attainable to all personnel who implement the training tools covered in the Suicide Prevention Program: identifying risk factors, knowing when and how to intervene, being familiar with one's referral resources, having healthy relationships, and understanding that seeking help usually does not have an impact on one's career.

Although Thule is not equipped with all the agencies found at larger installations, help is still at arm's reach. In particular, the staff at the Base Chapel are trained and prepared to work with personnel dealing with thoughts of suicide. And because the airman enjoys the right to privileged communication when consulting with the chaplain, he/she may choose to exercise this right to have the dialogue remain in confidential.

As a member of the Thule community, you are a key player in sustaining a healthy environment to ensure that all personnel survive this dark season, and beyond.

*(Taken from Air Force Print News, contribution by Chaplain (Capt) David Zavala)*

## Battle uniform available to deploying Airmen this spring

The Airman Battle Uniform is on track for distribution this spring to Airmen deploying as part of Air Expeditionary Forces 7 and 8, and it will be "wash and wear".

The ABU will replace the familiar camouflage-pattern Battle Dress Uniform, which replaced the olive drab "fatigues," and has been in use since 1981. The BDU was the field utility uniform for all branches of the United States Armed Forces. The Navy, Marines, and Army have also developed distinctive uniforms to replace the BDU.

The first prototype of the ABU was unveiled in the summer of 2003. The early uniform prototypes consisted of trousers, an embroidered undershirt, and a blouse. The camouflage pattern used was blue, non-digitized tiger stripes.

After months of "wear testing," Air Force officials revised the color scheme and camouflage pattern due to feedback received from Airmen. The new pixilated tiger stripe pattern would trade its blue overtones for a more subdued palette.

### Air Expeditionary Forces 7 and 8 are First

Air Expeditionary Forces 7 and 8 are the first to be issued the new ABU. Four ABU sets will be available for Battlefield Air-



men.

By October 2007, the Air Force will begin issuing the ABU to Airmen in basic military training, and in June 2008, the uniform will be available for purchase by the rest of the Air Force in Army Air Force Exchanges.

### Over 200 Sizes for Men and Women

The ABU boasts 236 different size options in both male and female sizes. Additionally, its permanent press finish means the uniform cannot be starched, pressed or dry-cleaned. Airmen will be able to pull the ABU from the clothes dryer and wear it without further treatment. Any ironing could degrade the effectiveness of the uniform.

The cost for the uniform, pants and coat, runs about \$81. Additional items, such as socks, T-shirts, belts, and ABU-style hats will also need to be purchased. Airmen are authorized to wear DCU-style boots with the ABU until the newly designed green boots become readily available. The green boots are priced at \$100.

The expected mandatory wear date for the new ABU is October 2011.

*(Information courtesy of Air Force Portal)*

# Higher education leads to success

by Tech. Sgt. Steven Wilson  
28th Bomb Wing Public Affairs

**ELLSWORTH AIR FORCE BASE, S.D. (AFPN)** -- Today's air expeditionary Airman is deploying longer and more often than ever before in a world of shrinking budgets, bonuses and manpower.

However, one benefit that hasn't gone away in these changing times is the educational opportunities offered by the Air Force. Those opportunities are becoming more important for anyone considering the profession of arms as a career.

## Effect on military career

"The secretary of the Air Force and the chief of staff's decision to make academic degree information available to officer promotion boards is an obvious signal of the value they place on educated Airmen," said Col. Bruce Emig, 28th Bomb Wing vice commander. "Given two officers with otherwise comparable records, it's clear that advanced education will become a key discriminator in determining promotion opportunities."

A higher education for career-minded Airmen isn't stopping at the officer ranks. Enlisted Airmen with the ambition to advance to the senior NCO corps should get in school, too.

"Current Air Force leadership recognizes that senior noncommissioned officers with higher education usually bring increased capabilities to their position and have mandated a Community College of the Air Force degree before receiving a senior rater endorsement, said Chief Master Sgt. John Gillette, Ellsworth AFB's command chief.

Without a senior-rater endorsement, Airmen will not get promoted, the chief said.

While promotions and professional development are always important, there are many other advantages obtaining advanced degrees.

## The bottom line

Between 1980 and 2004, earnings increased proportional to education for all young adults ages 25 to 34 who worked full time, said Paula Howard, Ellsworth's Base Training and Education Services flight chief.

What does this mean in real numbers?

Males with a four-year degree or higher earned 67 percent more than

males in the same age range who had a high school diploma only, Ms. Howard said. "In 2004, a male with a high school diploma earned \$30,400 while a male with a bachelor's degree or higher earned an average of \$50,700."

## CCAF

For enlisted Airmen, another benefit offered by the Air Force is the Community College of the Air Force degree. This is a bona fide degree from an accredited university available to the enlisted force. CCAF is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools.

Chief Gillette summarized the importance of a degree like CCAF for both career-minded Airmen and Airmen who choose to separate after serving.

"Education is what broadens our perspective and enhances our abilities to perform our mission," he said. "Our enlisted force has taken on increasingly demanding roles in the Air Force and I believe that trend will increase. I believe most of our Airmen today recognize the importance of education to help them advance their career in the Air Force and the value it has if they choose to separate after their enlistment."

To complete the CCAF degree a member must have 64 semester hours.

"Certain career fields receive enough credit hours from technical school to complete the 24 semester hours needed for technical education and most of the program electives, leaving only six semester hours in general education and 15 semester hours in program electives to complete," said Ms. Howard.

One concern Airmen may have in today's high operations-tempo environment is starting class and not having time to finish it before heading out for a deployment or temporary duty.

But, Ms. Howard says most institutions are very aware of this issue and can work with deploying Airmen to find a solution that makes sense.

"If you start school and find out you're deploying during the term, the local schools are willing to work with you to complete (the courses) successfully, either by e-mail or some other distance learning program," she said. "If this isn't possible, and you're progressing as expected in the class, an instructor can give you an incomplete until you return and then you would complete (the course) the

first term available after returning."

## Virtual education

Another option for today's busy military member is an online academic education.

"Online programs have come a long way in the past five years," said Ms. Brown. "There are hundreds of accredited institutions now that are offering online courses and degrees. Every day state and private schools are looking at ways to provide students with online programs."

Ms. Howard cautions that a prospective military student should do some research before deciding on an online university.

"There are, of course, the dubious academic institutions that say they have certain (degree granting) credentials and don't. Before ever committing to a school, the Air Force member should always take the time to come to BTES and talk with me or our counselor to get a better picture of the school they're attending," she said.

## Financial advantage

One concern the Air Force can nearly eliminate for the uniformed member is the cost associated with attending a university.

"The military member receives \$4,500 per fiscal year toward his tuition," Ms. Brown said. "A person in the military has a wonderful advantage over those who graduate from high school and immediately go to college."

"Granted, normally an active-duty student can only take part-time classes but, for the most part, with 100 percent tuition assistance the member doesn't have any college debts except to purchase books."

"Think of your education benefits as part of your pay," said Colonel Emig. "If you don't use them, you lose that pay."

The cost of books shouldn't deter the military student either.

"Many times our active-duty members are eligible for Pell Grants based on their income by applying for federal financial aid," said Ms. Brown.

Airmen interested in learning more about accredited distance learning programs can log on to [www.petersons.com/distancelearning/code/search.asp](http://www.petersons.com/distancelearning/code/search.asp).

For more information on starting a degree program, Airmen can call their local education and service center.





# Christmas

Photos by Capt Elizabeth Paul

## Holiday festivities



The 821<sup>st</sup> Air Base Group, 12<sup>th</sup> Space Warning Squadron, Detachment 3 and their guests kicked off the Holiday Season with a bash Dec. 1.

Members of Team Thule relaxed and enjoyed each others' company with a tasty buffet dinner followed by holiday games like name that tune, know your Christmas trivia and a spirited scavenger hunt.



## Secret Santa

The 821<sup>st</sup> Air Base Group staff and 821<sup>st</sup> Support Squadron exchanged gifts at a Hail and Farewell event Dec. 7. Members who participated were given a name and a \$20 spending limit.

